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Won't You Be My Neighbor?

How to Make Friends

by Candace Leigh

Work days are long and hectic. Nights and weekends, it's easy just to cocoon inside with Netflix DVDs, delivered pizza, and internet shopping. Between outside obligations and the ability to access most leisure resources without leaving the house, it's possible to go the entire tenure at your apartment and never meet your neighbors. Though it can be peaceful to live a little farther away from our families, urban living can get a bit lonely. So, outside of work and the bar scene, how does an adult make friends? Look next door. You already have one thing in common if you've chosen the same complex, there might be much more. Even if you and your neighbors don't become bosom friends, there are some real benefits to at least acting friendly.

The Benefits of Neighborliness

Once you've started some friendly chatter, you will enjoy:

- *Collective bargaining against management.* If there are any problems at your complex, it helps to have other tenants voice complaints with you.
- *Convenient plant, pet, or house sitters.*
- *A close place to stash emergency keys.*
- *A resource for borrowing milk and sugar.*
- *A more receptive ear when there is a problem.* It's easier to talk to your neighbors about issues like late night noisiness when you already have a relationship.
- *Safety and security.* A neighbor who knows you better will be both more concerned and better able to recognize unusual activity around your place.
- *Help moving, carrying large items, and unwieldy household tasks.*
- *The ability to share some big ticket purchases.* Save money by splitting the cost of items like rented carpet cleaners, lawn mowers, or even bulk purchases of household goods. Save space by splitting storage of infrequently used items, like pool rafts, with the understanding that either of you can enjoy them.
- *New friends, of course!*

The Hazards

Before you get too cozy, there are a few risks to being friendly, too:

- *"Too close for comfort" living and intrusive questions.*
- *Kramer-style borrowing.*
- *Lack of privacy.* The more your neighbors know about you, the more they will be conscientious of your comings, goings, and noises (and the more they may gossip about your private life).

- *Lack of objectivity.* Neighbor-friends may cut you more or less slack regarding your habits as a tenant than neighbors they don't know.
- *Sense of obligation.* To preserve the friendship, you'll have to stop and say "hi" every time you see them. It can be uncomfortable to throw a shindig without inviting them, too.

Meet Your Neighbors

Who knows how long you'll be living in the same pad. Develop good relationships with your neighbors now so they'll be receptive when you need them.

- *Say "hi."* Don't be shy – just go up and introduce yourself.
- *Be a conscientious tenant.* Observe quiet living, good gym and parking habits, and pick your battles over noises, pets, kids, etc.
- *Know your neighborhood.* Be a resource for directions, local goings-on, and hidden treasure restaurants and shopping.
- *Be complimentary.* Follow Dale Carnegie and find plenty (okay, at least one) nice things to say.
- *Share treats.* Double your baking recipe so you can take some muffins next door or cut some extra mint from your window box.
- *Be social in community areas.* Strike up a conversation and share a beer at the pool, rec room, gym, laundry, or garage.
- *Attend community events.* Even if it sounds cheesy, check out the pizza and ice cream socials sponsored by your complex.
- *Invite neighbors to your parties.* The more the merrier, right?

Outside of a few Gladys Kravitzes, your neighbors are mostly good eggs. Though it's awkward to break the ice, conversations will progress painlessly from the weather to more interesting subjects. Be courteous - at the end of a long workday, don't monopolize them with small talk when the key is in the lock. Just be your own sunny self, and you'll be making friends in no time.